

The Army

ARMY

The Sinai

# UNEF I DIARY

The Sinai

EGYPT

11 March 1965 14 Jun 1966  
11 to 10 to

*John*

# The Army Years - The Sinai

• SOS  
10 Mar  
1965

• Emb  
Canada  
posted  
Middle  
East  
11 Mar  
1965

I arrived at El Arish Airport in Egypt in the Sinai Desert in <sup>of</sup> via Athens & Pisa Italy where we had stayed over night. The only thing I remember about Pisa is lousy spaghetti served as an entree - no sauce, no meat, no cheese - just cold spaghetti. I remember the Pisa tower & ringing the bell, I remember a funeral with the hearse drawn by horses and the bathtub in the hotel. Why the bathtub? - because it was shaped like a chair with a seat that you sat in not lay down in. Very practical for reading.

In Athens we stayed in a few hours and was a 100% American base - a good view of the Acropolis. Then came the dreaded trip across the Mediterranean to the mysterious Middle East. We finally hit the coast of Egypt & were not disappointed. There as far as the eye could see was sand. And as if on cue from

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a grade B move - there was the lonely Arab on his camel. One Arab, one camel & miles from anywhere. He was set out there like a stage prop - too improbable to be true.

The North Star turned east after hitting the coast and within 5 minutes, we were in our noisy descent to El Arish Airport.

The Egyptians <sup>occupied</sup> had 90% of the airport, including the tower. They had several Mig fighters which rarely flew but were always being run up at full throttle on the ground. Egyptian soldiers were drying nap & then, if you could call their marching "drill." The soldiers left the impression they were "putting in time" being soldiers. No bunkers. No tanks. No anti-aircraft guns.

The North Star arrived at El Arish once a week from Canada with parts, mail, equipment & replacement people. The North Star's

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most important function was  
not to bring people in -  
it was to take people out  
- to take them home.

Remember United Nation  
Emergency Force One or  
UNEF 1/ had a one year  
unaccompanied posting attached  
to it. Later, much later  
it was changed with UNEF 2  
to 6 months posting.

When you asked a person  
how long they had been  
in the Sinai they never  
answered your question.

Rather they answered 90  
days to go, or 2 weeks  
to go. Always xx days to  
go - never how long they  
had been there.

One remembers vividly  
important events in one's life.  
I can remember where I  
was when President Kennedy  
was assassinated, & remember  
Walter Cronkite describing the  
first manned Moon landing  
- two big events in my  
lifetime. Well I also  
remember vividly arriving  
at El Arish.

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I was relieving Captain Bob Emberly, an officer I knew from my first Army posting at 41 Transport Company in Winnipeg. He metted me & took me under his wing. I was whisked through the rather cursory customs & immigration (carried out by a man the same person). His only task appeared to be to check the passenger list to ensure there were no Jewish names. This I later found strange because the Arabs were surprisingly tolerant of their Jews & Christians.

Bob Emberly loaded me in his Citroen 1 1/2 HP small little car. It had four seats fabric laced over the seat frame, as one would find on a lawn chair. You felt the car was so small you could pick it up & throw it.

The car was painted white with the blue UN painted on the doors. The El Arish airbase was 8 miles from the El Arish camp where we stayed, on the coast near the sea: called Marina Camp.

~~Army years~~

ARMY

Chapter 2

EGYPT

The Sinai

Arrival at  
El Arish  
Egypt

we got off the  
North Star on the main  
runway. We could not  
go to the small United  
Nations Hut & Hangar  
because a month previously  
a Yugoslav plane of  
the same weight had  
gone through the taxi  
strip.

A few hasty repairs  
had been made in order  
to get the DHC  
Caribous and Others in  
and out. But no way  
a heavy laden North Star  
Aircraft of 4 engines